DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 182 PS 018 576

AUTHOR Bastianello, Sandra
TITLE Implementation of a Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution Strategies in a Primary Classroom.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 63p.; Ed.D. Practicum, Nova University.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Practicum Papers (043)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; *Conflict Resolution; *Elementary School Students; Grade 2; Grade 3; Inservice Teacher Education; *Interpersonal Competence; Peer Relationship; Primary Education; *Student Improvement; *Time Factors (Learning); Workshops

ABSTRACT

An experienced primary school teacher designed a practicum to teach conflict resolution strategies to 20 second and third grade students in a suburban private school outside a large city in the southeastern United States.The main goal was to train students in prosocial skills so that they could resolve their conflicts with classmates peacefully, quickly, and without involving an adult. To achieve this goal, the practitioner: (1) sent a questionnaire to teachers in the school to assess the amount of class time spent in conflict; (2) conducted an observational assessment to gather additional information on the amount of class time expended in disputes; (3) taught conflict resolution strategies to students; (4) oversaw groups who were using the strategies; and (5) presented, with the aid of students, a conflict resolution training workshop for teachers. Practicum evaluation data indicated that the intervention had positive outcomes. The amount of time involved in conflict declined and the use of various prosocial methods of conflict resolution increased. Appendices provide instrumentation, a synopsis of the workshop, and an outline of the conflict resolution process. Approximately 20 references are cited. (RH)

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IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROGRAM FOR TEACHING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

BY

SANDRA BASTIANELLO

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IMPLEMENTATION OF A PROGRAM FOR TEACHING CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

by

Sandra Bastianello

Cluster 29

PS 018776

A Practicum I Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1989

PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Joanne Holden
Joanne Holden

Director, High Meadows School

Roswell, Georgia

November 16, 1989

This practicum report was submitted by Sandra Bastianello under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

Dec. 8, 1989 — Wanda M. Slayton, Ph.D.

Date of Final Approval of Report — Dr. Wanda Slayton, Adviser

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge the support and cooperation of the administration, staff and students of the participating school.
Much encouragement, energy and willingness were extended throughout the length of this project.

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ABSTRACT

Implementation of a Program for Teaching Conflict Resolution Strategies in a Primary Classroom. Bastianello, Sandra C., 1989: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Conflict Resolution/ Prosocial Behavior/ Cooperation/ Primary Education/ Early Childhood Education

This practicum was designed to teach conflict resolution strategies to second and third grade students. The primary goal was to train the students in these skills so that they could resolve their conflicts with fellow classmates in a peaceful, prosocial manner quickly, without the involvement of an adult, thus reducing the amount of academic class time spent in disputes.

The writer sent a questionnaire aimed at assessing the amount of class time spent in conflict to other teachers in the school; did an observational assessment in her own class to gather information on the amount of class time spent in disputes; taught conflict resolution strategies to the students; oversaw the group work with these strategies; and presented a workshop with the aid of her students, to the teachers in the school, training them in conflict resolution strategies.

The results of the practicum were positive. Analysis of the data revealed that the amount of time involved in conflict was reduced and the use of more, prosocial methods of conflict resolution rose.

Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Work Setting and Community

The private school used for this project was in a surburban area outside a large city in the southeastern United States. The school included a preschool, starting at age three and continuing through the sixth grade. The enrollment for the entire school was 250 students. The socioeconomic status of the population was in the upper middle income range. The school promoted an individualized activity-based program which responded to the developmental stage of each child. The classes were multiage. A child usually stayed in one class two years, thus experiencing the benefits of being a younger and then an older student. There were forty acres of woods, meadows and open areas which the children could explore. During the summer months the school grounds were used as a summer day camp. Many of the students from the school also attended the camp in the summer.

There were 34 teachers in the school. Generally two teachers were in a class with 18 to 24 children. Specialized resource teachers provided instruction in science and nature, computer, music, Spanish, woodworking and physical

education. Two learning disability specialists provided one-to-one instruction and support to children diagnosed with learning disabilities. Enrichment activities throughout the year provided the children contact with the fine arts and community resources.

The primary class being used in this project had twenty students ranging in age from seven to nine. The grade designation waas second and third grade, however the ability range within the class was from middle of first grade to fourth grade level. Each student had a set of requirements which had to be met each day. These included individual assignments in reading and math, a time for creative writing and varying assignments in spelling, science and social studies. Once the child had completed the requirements for the day he or she had free choice time to choose an activity of interest. This might be art or math activities or an instructional game.

Both teachers had degrees in education and experience in teaching this age group. They had taught together for three years.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer has taught in primary age classes for ten years. At the time of this project she was

the lead teacher in the class of second and third graders. In this setting she was responsible for planning and implementing the program to meet the needs of the students. The program was individualized in reading, mathematics and writing. Where necessary the workload and content was modified to address the needs of individual students with learning disabilities, developmental delay or gifted ability. Having been in this particular classroom for seven years the teacher had seen seven different groups of students proceed through the program. By having each child two years she had had the opportunity to see the development which occured over this time span, thus seeing the areas which needed improvement.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Description

Children became involved in conflicts with their classmates and were not able to resolve these conflicts satisfactorily. The conflict continued throughout the class day, resulting in the children involved not concentrating on their assignments and not feeling that they could handle interactions with classmates successfully.

Class time was not used optimally by the students due to their interpersonal conflicts. Much time was involved in the disputes and a lack of concentration was evident in the amount and quality of the students' work. The children also exhibited behavior such as staying to themselves and not interacting with the other students after one of these conflict situations. Many times the teacher was called in to help resolve the conflict. This intervention took time away from the instruction of the other students. By needing to include the teacher in their problems in this way the children were demonstrating that they did not know the steps to take to resolve the conflict peacefully on their own.

If this problem were solved the children would be able to handle their conflicts successfully to

the mutual satisfaction of all involved within a short time frame and thus be able to return to their academic tasks quickly and with a sense of accomplishment and pride. Briefly stated then, the situation was that students had not developed conflict resolution strategies to use in order to resolve their conflicts quickly and peacefully.

Problem Documentation

Observations of students' behavior indicated that too much of the class day was spent in students disagreeing and not being able to handle these conflicts satisfactorily.

These observations revealed that on a particular class day sixteen of the twenty students were involved in some kind of disagreement that interfered with academic time. There were nine different conflict situations ranging from a five minute disagreement between two students over the establishment of the ownership of a pencil to a situation involving five of the children for an extended length of time. In this particular disagreement one of the children was off task for twenty-five minutes, either discussing the situation with the other children or by herself in

the hall crying over the argument. Two other students were involved for twenty minutes each.

Three of the conflict situations went beyond verbal disagreement and discussion to some kind of physical force being used such as pushing or shoving another student. The total time taken away from academic time, considering all the students involved, was 185 minutes. Out of the nine conflict situations, the teacher was called to intervene five times. Appendix 1 shows the type of chart used to collect this data. Due to time away from task, four of the children were not able to complete their assignments within the alloted time, thus did not go on to free choice activities.

Questionnaires and interviews with other teachers indicated that this was a problem area within their classrooms also. All of the fourteen teachers interviewed indicated that conflict among the children resulted in time away from task for the students within their classes.

Causative Analysis

Students did not have appropriate resolution strategies to use in conflict situations. The children often repeated the same statements and

blamed each other for the problem rather than seeking a workable solution for the problem. They did not know the steps to take in order to arrive at a peaceful solution. As the discussion escalated the children's emotional involvement escalated and angry words and sometimes physical force was used to try to persuade the other person to stop the arguement.

Students became overly involved in each other's situations, thus too many students became involved in a conflict that initially may have involved only two students.
Since many of the students had been together since they were three years old there were often very close friendships formed within this group. Also, since this group of children were, overall, very concerned about each other, it was very difficult for them not to become involved with each others' problems.

Students did not have a clear understanding of the time frames, thus did not realize that a large amount of class time which was needed to complete academic tasks had been spent on resolving a conflict. Since the academic requirements were handled in the order the students desired and since no time frames were given for specific subjects,

much time could pass without the children being aware that they had been involved in a discussion for an extended amount of time. They understood that it was their responsibility to finish the work by the end of the day, and because they could carry it over into the afternoon time, if necessary, they did not feel a sense of urgency to complete the work quickly.

The atmosphere of this classroom also promoted a lot of student interaction. The children who were engaged in a discussion over a problem did not stand out as they might in a more structured academic environment. Therefore they had the opportunity to engage in discussion for a long period of time.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Conflict among children is a natural occurence. A review of the literature written on conflict and children rendered important information for adults who interact with children on a daily basis. Often conflict among children is considered a negative experience, however it can be positive since it forces the children to look at situations from a perspective different from their own. It therefore encourages the social

development of the child (Shantz, 1987). An understanding of the methods children presently used in resolving their conflicts and a knowledge of other, possibly more positive methods, enables adults to help children more effectively cope with and resolve conflict when it arises.

Several aspects of conflict and its resolution came into focus when the topic was studied. Basic understandings of the nature of conflict, the issues that caused conflict to arise between children, and the types of negotiation strategies used by most children were needed. Also of importance was a knowledge of the appropriate expectations to have depending on the children's developmental levels. Unrealistic expectations would be frustrating to both the children and the adult. The friendship status, the ages, and the sex of the children involved also added to the understanding of the potential problems that could arise and how to assess them. Once the adult had a good knowledge base of the previously mentioned areas, being aware of creative, prosocial, and peaceful ways of resolving conflict was needed in order to show the children other ways of handling their interpersonal difficulties.

Knowledge of the structure and characteristics of conflict was beneficial in being able to understand and resolve it. Three types of conflict have been discussed by Coombs (1987). Type I conflict involved an individual who was faced with two options but must choose one. An example of this type would be a child facing a choice of which toy to play with when there are two choices. Type II conflict was conflict between two individuals who want different things but must settle for the same thing. An example was when two children wished to play together but each wanted to play a different activity. They must decide on a joint activity. The two children were pulled in opposite directions, but they must come to agree on the same activity. Type III conflict involved two individuals who wanted the same thing but must settle for different things as in the case of two children wishing to play with the same toy but needing to settle for two different toys. The last two types of conflict were inevitable due to the nature of people and their opposing desires. When two or more children came together in social interaction, these two types of conflict were evident.

The various types of conflict could be observed when viewing the different issues over which children disagree. In a study done by Shantz and Shantz (1985) with six and seven year olds it was found that children fought about the control of object use, the control of space use, the control of the other's behavior, physical contact and the desire to change the other's beliefs and ideas. By far, most of the disputes involved object and person control. There was a difference however, between these depending on the sex of the child. Girls tended to come into conflict more often when one was trying to control the other's behavior. Boys fought more about the control of an object (Shantz & Shantz, 1985).

There were various types of strategies which could be observed when children were trying to resolve these conflicts on their own. The core of children's interactions involved negotiations which attempted to resolve conflict (Krappman & Oswald, 1987). In a study of fourth and sixth grade students done by Krappman and Oswald (1987), the types of strategies used in negotiation were found to be coercion and manipulation, offer and reply, and reasoning. When using coercion and manipulation strategies one child was seen as an

obstacle to the desired goal and had to be brushed aside in order to reach the goal. With this self-oriented motive involved, the other child often responded back with coercion and manipulation also, thus not using a peaceful, prosocial way of solving the problem.

Another type of negotiation strategy involved offer and reply (Krappman & Oswald, 1987). With this method one child had the opposite intention of the other and one had to give up his or her own desires. In this type of strategy the reason for the other to give up his or her desire was not explained.

When using reasoning the children appealed to each others' mutual responsibility and came to a solution which was agreeable to both parties (Krappman & Oswald, 1987). Reasoning was seldom found to be used to aid resolution of the conflict in either the fourth or the sixth grade students.

Many of the interactions in the Krappman and Oswald (1987) study were found to be asymmetric and disrespectful, but even if this was understandable, the methods used did not offer challenges to the children to have one take the perspective of the other, to analyze an issue from different views, to explain the reasons used, to protect the feelings

or self-images of the other, or to develop mutual responsibility. These challenges to look at the conflict in other ways aided in the development of the child in this area of socialization, for it stretched them to reflect a change in orientation and take the perspective of the other person (Selman & Demorest, 1984). Without the guidance of an adult, children seldom came to this understanding.

Shantz and Shantz (1985) found verbal aggression, physical aggression, commands and requests as the types of strategies used. The children involved in the Shantz study, however, were six and seven years old compared to the ten and twelve year olds in the Krappman and Oswald study so their strategies were somewhat different because of their ages. Boys had a higher degree of physical aggression and a higher rate of conflict, while girls used more verbal aggression and had a lower rate of conflict. The degree of success in conflict issues was unrelated to physical aggression. Success rate was shown to be related to a high use of commands and less use of verbal aggression and requests. The rate and type of strategy used reflected the general likability of the child in question. The children who had fewer

confrontations and used less physical aggression were shown to be more likeable by the other children (Shantz & Shantz, 1985).

Often when the child displayed unkind or unreflecting behavior it was due to the child's failure to recognize the intention of the other (Krappman & Oswald, 1987). The young child was aware of the social rules, but seldom refered to self-knowledge, or one's ability to benefit others (Ladd, Lange, & Stremmel, 1983).

When an adult was dealing with children in helping them learn to resolve their conflicts with others, the developmental level of the children involved had to be considered. It was important to be aware of the children's cognitive stage since the child's stage of moral reasoning and hence ability to be aware of the other's point of view in a conflict was based on this developmental level (Shantz & Shantz, 1985; Smith, 1982; Walker & Richards, 1979). Reporting on their study, Buckley, Siegel and Ness (1979) stated that there "appears to be a significant cognitive component of prosocial behavior. Children who behaved altruistically displayed more empathy and perspective-taking ability" (p.330). The ability to resolve conflicts in a prosocial fashion hence,

depended on the child's ability to think in that manner.

Even children at an earlier stage of development could identify with the needs and feelings of others (Trepanier & Rosatowski, 1981). This understanding of the feelings of others led to an increased level of empathy for the other (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979). With the child's increased awareness of the other's perspective and the development of more effective language skills with increased age, the ability to problem solve and thus resolve conflict was enhanced (Smith, 1982).

The lower level strategies used by younger children need not be seen as necessarily immature, but as an expected stage for the younger child (Selman & Demorest, 1984). This was part of normal development and was age appropriate for the young child. Such behaviors as grabbing, submissiveness and orders may have seemed undesirable behaviors to the adult working with the child, but it was part of the normal sequence of events for the child as he or she grew in the ability to use conflict resolution strategies (Selman & Demorest, 1984).

The stages written about in this process by Selman and Demorest (1984), included stage 0 which was impulsive and physical, stage 1 which was

unilateral and coercive, stage 2 which was reciprocal and influential, and stage 3 which was collaborative and mutual. The more advanced stages required a more advanced level of reasoning ability and a better awareness of the needs of the other person involved. Conflict-inducing procedures aided in the transition from one stage to the next (Walker & Richards, 1979).

A child's reasoning changed over time and added stress was placed on the child if expected to use reasoning beyond the ability level (Smith, 1982) and the transitions would not occur until the attainment of the cognitive prerequisites (Walker & Richards, 1979). This did not mean however, that the child could not be encouraged to think of and care for others. Even in infancy the early precursors of altruism could be seen (Honig, 1984). " Empathetic responding plays an important role in the early development of a prosocial orientation" (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979, p. 136). The need for caring for others could be taught early in the child's life. By the middle elementary years children viewed a peer's need as a condition of priority (Ladd, Lange, & Stremmel, 1983).

Many of the child's own negotiations in conflict were seen as immature and did not, on

their own, lead to increased social competence (Krappman & Oswald, 1987), thus the need for the adults involved in the child's life to intervene and provide means of peaceful, prosocial methods of conflict resolution. Shantz & Shantz (1985) reported on four developmental levels of social-cognitive assessments. In the first level the child described a person in terms of possessions or appearance or family. More forceful strategies such as physical attack or verbal attack were used. Adult intervention was usually necessary to resolve the conflict at this level.

The second social-cognitive level discussed involved an increasing awareness of social influences (Shantz & Shantz, 1985). A person was seen in terms of social relations, usually with the child in question such as liking or disliking a friend. Directives such as asking and saying please, and giving commands was used at this level.

In the third level a person was seen as a unique individual and general behaviors and roles and details of acquaintanceship are used to describe the other person (Shantz & Shantz, 1985). Such things as taking turns, reciprocity and meeting the other's needs, trading, sharing or

offering something for compliance was used at this stage.

The most advanced stage, stage four, showed the person involved describing the other in general psychological terms (Shantz & Shantz, 1985). More indirect strategies such as waiting, ignoring, tricking, and planning for the future was included in this stage.

The research done by Eisenberg-Berg, (1979) which reported that elementary students showed similar stages going from a hedonistic perspective through an approval orientation to interpersonally oriented strategies to a labeling of others' needs. This illustrated development through stage 3 of the Shantz and Shantz (1985) social-cognitive levels. The older high school students of the Eisenberg-Berg (1979) study had the same levels shown as the elementary students, but then went on to include more empathetic and abstract or internalized moral concerns for the other person. "An empathetic responding plays an important role in the early development of a prosocial orientation" (Eisenberg-Berg, 1979, p. 136) thus this developmental level needed to be reached in order for the child to understand various prosocial methods of conflict resolution. Children with

higher personal conceptions and thus a higher social-cognitive score engaged in fewer personal conflicts than children with lower personal conceptions (Shantz &Shantz, 1985). The more advanced the rule concepts of a particular child and the higher the social-cognitive level, the greater degree of success the child was found to have in a conflict situation (Shantz & Shantz, 1985).

Consideration of the friendship status and the sex of the children involved also needed to be included in discussing the ways children handled a conflict situation. Between friends there was more positive negotiating than between nonfriends (Nelson & Aboud, 1985; Shantz, 1987) and these negotiations increased with age (Krappman & Oswald, 1987). The negotiation strategies used among friends also showed more positive, prosocial orientations and more accepted solutions than among nonfriends (Krappman & Oswald, 1987; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). Children who were best friends did not follow a pattern of coercive manipulation at the beginning of the negotiation as did occur sometimes among nonfriends, therefore they did not push the point of the discussion to an unacceptable termination (Krappman & Oswald, 1987). There was a

greater tolerance for criticism and arguement for friends (Nelson & Aboud , 1985).

Children who were in relationships within social groups learned to deal with conflict more effectively and affection and kindness could emerge (Smith, 1982). Having a friend was critical for social-emotional development (Nelson & Aboud, 1985).

Children had various ways of handling their interpersonal conflicts. These means were not necessarily the most appropriate methods to use in resolving the problem. Conflict among children was a natural occurence and as such had to be recognized and handled by the adults involved in their care.

In the review of the literature the premise that conflict was a natural occurence among children had been discussed. It had been found to occur on a regular basis within the class being used in this project. The Shantz and Shantz (1985) study among six and seven year olds found that object and person control were the most prevalent causes of conflict in this age group. The students in this classroom did become extremely involved in attempting to control another person or control the use of a particular object.

When relating the information found in the research concerning the developmental levels of children and their relationship to the types of strategies used to resolve conflict, the students involved appeared to be moving from an egocentric type of orientation into one which took into account the view and needs of the other person. The types of negotiation strategies used by the children were showing more maturity also.

The friendship status of the children also affected the type of negotiation style used. The students who were friends used more positive negotiation strategies than did nonfriends. Thus the problems which were occurring among the students in conflict situations and the types of strategies they used to resolve them reflected the same type of considerations as those listed in the literature.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals and Expectations

The goals of this project were to decrease the amount of class time involved in the resolution of conflict among children by providing them more positive, prosocial methods of conflict resolution. The use of these methods hopefully would provide the children with a sense of community, friendship and mutual cooperation thus promoting a more cooperative atmosphere within the class. In order to promote this type of atmosphere throughout the school a workshop for fellow teachers provided other teachers a model to use within their own classrooms.

Behavioral Objectives

1. Class time for the resolution of conflicts would be decreased by 50% which would reduce time from 185 minutes to 92.5 minutes.
2. The children would use poitive, prosocial means of resolving conflicts. Out of nine conflicts at the beginning of the time period three resulted in some kind of physical force being used. This number was hoped to be reduced to

one.

3. The children would demonstrate a more widely developed friendship base by interacting with a wider circle of friends than at the beginning.
4. The children would resolve conflict successfully within the group process. At the beginning of the project four of the nine conflicts were resolved successfully within the group process. This number would be raised to seven of nine times.
5. Other teachers within the school would demonstrate their knowledge of the steps and methods to use in conflict resolution and their ability to use these methods within their own classrooms.

Measurement of Objectives

1. An observational measure was used which plotted amount of class time needed for resolution of conflicts. This measure was a written evaluation instrument which listed the names of the children in the class down the side of the page.

A key was used which denoted the method used for the resolution of the conflict and the amount of time involved in each conflict.

2. An assessment was made which demonstrated the type of strategies being used to resolve conflict. The number of times each strategy was used was noted. This measure was used in conjunction with the instrument mentioned above. The children's names were listed on a page with a notation being made of the type of strategy used.
3. A sociometric assessment was made which indicated the three most liked and three least liked students of each child. At the end of the project another assessment was made denoting any changes.
4. A record was kept of each group time and the amount of successful resolutions being achieved in this process.
5. A questionnaire was given to the teachers involved in the workshop. The questionnaire reported the teachers' knowledge in this area.

Mechanism for Recording Unexpected Events

A journal was kept to record the events which occurred in relation to this practicum problem. Any unexpected events were recorded so that they could be utilized in the final report on this project.

Description of Plans for Analyzing Results

The data from this project was analyzed by comparing the starting data and the ending data in each of the areas. Numbers were used to denote the amount of change achieved during the course of the project.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The understanding that children were going to engage in conflict with their peers and would seldom learn to handle them as effectively as they could led adults to the necessity for teaching the children more prosocial, positive ways of handling the resolution of their conflicts. "Mastery of personal and social relationships must be learned" (Smith, 1982, p. 20). It had been found that evaluative comments and general feedback given to children by their teachers, exerted a great deal of impact on them (Holte, Jamruszka, Gustafson, Beaman, & Camp, 1984), thus teachers just talking with the children about their conflict situations could have an impact on them. Within the population being used in this project much positive teacher feedback was used already. While this helped provide reinforcement for the children and provided a change in behavior for a limited amount of time, this still did not provide the children with concrete steps to use in solving their conflicts independently.

More direct teaching of problem solving skills was needed also (Bergmann, 1987; Slife & Cook,

1986; Smith, 1982). There was more of a concern among educators for affective education (Holte, et al., 1984). Teachers who emphasized the development of the whole child and emphasized imagination could encourage children into more creative types of problem solving (Smith, 1982). A portion of the school day needed to be directed toward problem solving activities and children needed to be praised for a willingness to try. Experimentation needed to be welcomed and risk-taking needed to be the rule, rather than the exception (Slife & Cook, 1986). Structured experiences could have assisted the children and facilitated the process of problem solving and resolution techniques (Bergmann, 1987).

Bergmann (1987) had listed several components needed in the curriculum. The first was a caring and competent teacher who allowed interactions within a safe environment. Others included a student attitude survey used to assess how the student felt about the process, a community analysis providing information on outside resources, provision within the curriculum to provide opportunities for the children to problem solve in all their classes, a total school commitment to provide for developing within the

students a positive self-concept, a classroom environment that was conducive to students asking questions and getting answers without a fear of failure, a variety of materials to show how adults made decisions, and inservice training so that teachers learned and participated in the process of decision-making and problem solving. Children needed to become aware of the decision-making process used by the adults in their lives and how they decided on alternatives and evaluated the possible consequences involved in the use of those possible alternatives (Bergmann, 1987).

In order to begin such an approach certain areas needed to be addressed (Bergmann, 1987). The children had to be asked about their concerns. Reminders to the students that they were going through developmental stages and they could expect certain dilemmas to occur due to age could have been encouraging to the students because they could realize they were not alone in these problems and there were others who had to resolve them also.

Communication among the teachers was needed so that each knew what the others were covering. The community needed to be involved so that local resources could be utilized. Interdisciplinary units which focused on self-esteem needed to be

taught. When tough issues occurred spontaneously within the classroom the teachers had to be able to deal with them factually right then and needed to incorporate decision-making skills in the process. Older students needed to be called on to help model positive problem solving skills.

The principal also needed to assure each student that he or she had access to at least one adult who knew and cared about him or her. A written curriculum needed to be provided for new teachers in order to incorporate them into this system. Also necessary were opportunities, both in and out of school, so that students could practice these positive, problem solving skills with their peers.

Throughout the school day students needed to be encouraged to look for decision making. When reading stories discussions needed to include recalling the decisions made by the characters and the consequences which followed those decisions. In social studies the decisions made which changed history and the process used to make those decisions could have been reviewed. The students could have been encouraged also to identify major decisions made for them. Every opportunity which

could point out decision making processes needed to be utilized (Bergmann, 1987).

Description of Selected Solution

Within the project school many of these types of activities were already in use. These methods were not used consistently, however, and many of the teachers involved might not have been concious of the skills they were showing the children. Often when events occurred they were handled at the time and many problem solving skills were in use, however the specific methods used were not always pointed out to the students. In incorporating this type of curriculum the teachers needed workshops in which they were taught the specific skills to be used and be made aware of the many strategies they already used which could be described to the children.

Methods which had been used in other areas, were used also with children. Workshops held for Head Start teachers in conflict resolution strategies (Grissinger, 1986) , creative problem solving methods written about for nurses (Marriner, 1987), management strategies (Blai, 1986), and information written to the general public (Bolton,

1979), all gave valuable information on conflict resolution and problem solving strategies.

Information presented to the Head Start teachers provided them with a better understanding of how they felt about conflict and the issues it raised with them, training in more effective listening skills, and a basis for approaching conflict resolution (Grissinger, 1986). In helping the participants deal with conflict management they were helped to anticipate and cope with others who might be experiencing difficulty with conflict. The method outlined by Grissinger (1986) for problem solving was taught to the children. These involved defining the problem, brainstorming possible solutions, examining alternatives and finding the best solution for all, making an action plan, implementing the plan and evaluating how the plan was working.

Slife and Cook (1986) discussed similar steps.The potential benefits of the steps of this plan were that one better defined the problem areas, change was encouraged in both people, motivation to deal with problems was increased, people were energized, better and more creative solutions might were found, stronger, more intimate relationships were evolved, good feelings about the

self and others were increased, the ability to see the other side was encouraged, self-understanding was increased and it cleared the air (Grissinger, 1986). As with adults, children also benefitted from these suggestions and were taught the strategies.

Small group interaction was encouraged within this school setting. The children were accustomed to sitting in groups and discussing problems and arriving at solutions, however specific steps had not been taught to them. Since the children were aware of the possibilities of positive outcomes from group interaction they were very open to following and implementing a format which allowed this process to be structured and allowed all participants to understand what was being expected.

The creative problem solving strategies mentioned by Marriner (1987) also provided methods which were taught to children. The techniques were explained to the children and appropriate situations for each one's use was discussed. The different techniques were then explained. Which technique was chosen depended on the power the person had relative to the other person involved, the value of the relationship, and the time that was available for the resolution of the conflict.

the resolution of the conflict. Each conflict management technique had a different balance and while one might have pushed for the desired outcome, the other needed to be helped to achieve some of his or her desired outcome also. Flexibility was needed in resolving conflict. Conflict could be handled by accomodating the other person and putting own concerns aside. This method was more cooperative than assertive but was the best response when the conflict was a serious disruption, the other person had unilateral power, or what the person wanted was wrong or would not resolve the conflict (Marriner, 1987).

A second method was avoidance. This technique protected one from an upsetting confrontation but it was unassertive. It might be the best solution however when to have one's own way involved too high a price, what one wanted was not worth the trouble, when one needed more information before the confrontation, when someone else was in a better position to resolve the conflict, when both parties had hot tempers and needed to calm down and when the conflict was a symptom of a deeper issue (Marriner, 1987).

solving and a full agreement by both parties on a solution. This technique required more time but might have been the best one to use when something could be learned by exploring the other's point of view, when one could have gained a commitment from others, and when feelings needed to be worked through.

Competition was another method. When one needed more power than the other person and could risk some possible damage to the relationship. This technique was aggressive and uncooperative however, but was useful when an emergency occured or the other person might have taken unfair advantage and imposed on one's rights.

The last strategy mentioned by Marriner (1987) was a compromise in which each person gave up some of what was wanted. This method was not as good as collaboration, but was a good balance between assertiveness and cooperation. It could best be used when no other solution satisfied the situation, the parties had tried competing and compromising was the next best solution, when the issue was too important to accomodate or avoid, or when one was willing to trade off. It solved the problem quickly so no damage was done to the relationship. Children were taught that at

different times each of these strategies might be appropriate.

Management strategies written about by Blai (1986) included steps to problem solving also. These steps included determining if the problem was one which required other than routine handling, determining exactly what the problem was, breaking it down into parts, establishing priorities for solving the problems, developing alternative courses for action, determining probable outcomes for the actions, deciding which course was best, deciding a plan of action, scheduling the implementation of the plan, and knowing alternative actions which could be taken if original fails. These steps were taught to the children as part of the program of conflict resolution.

Bolton (1979) wrote of the need to deal with the emotions involved when conflict arises. In order to discharge these emotions three steps were required. The other person had to be treated with respect, one needed to listen until the other person's side had been experienced and one's views, needs and feelings needed to be stated. By discharging the emotions through these steps the participants in the conflict could better problem solve. Since many of children's conflicts involved

a high emotional state, these steps were used successfully with them.

In this particular setting when conflict had been dealt with in the past it had been found that if the children's emotions were not acknowledged, the issue was not be settled. The children needed to learn how to deal with these emotions and be able to express exactly what they were feeling at the time. Once those feelings had been expressed many of the emotional outbursts were lessened. By using a system whereby the children were taught directly about acknowledging each other's emotions and listening attentively to the other person, much of the problem solving was handled by the children independently.

Report of Action Taken

The solution planned for implementation was one involving several of the strategies listed above. The children were taught conflict resolution steps and strategies within the group setting. These groups were scheduled to meet twice a week. In the beginning sessions rules for group meetings were determined by the group. Once these had been established and were posted so all the children had a clear understanding of them the

issue of conflict itself was addressed. A discussion to present an understanding of conflict and the ways being used to handle it at the time was held. This helped set the stage so that the children had a clear understanding of what was occurring and the areas in which trouble was being experienced. The amount of time being used to resolve issues was discussed also so that the children understood how much of their class time was being used in ways that might be used more productively if they could resolve their conflicts more quickly and peacefully.

Once the introductory period was over the direct steps of resolving conflict mentioned by Bolton (1979) was taught. This teaching included steps to acknowledge the other person's feelings and the ability to listen and rephrase what the other person had said. In the process of teaching these steps a discussion was held illustrating the way other types of communication often blocked the open flow of thoughts and feelings. Communication roadblocks (Gordon, 1970) such as ordering, commanding, warning, advising, giving solutions and name-calling was discussed so that the children had a clear idea of the strategies they were using in

trying to talk the other person out of the conflict. These ways were shown to stop the open flow of communication with the other person or persons involved in the conflict. By teaching the children the process of listening carefully and then having to rephrase what the other person had said it was anticipated that they would find it necessary to try to see the other person's perspective.

When the listening and rephrasing steps had been mastered sufficiently the children were taught the direct steps of conflict resolution. These included the steps designed to, "define the problem, brainstorm possible solutions, examine alternatives to find the best solution for all involved, make the action plan, implement the plan (and) evaluate" (Grissinger, 1986, p.29). It was anticipated that these steps would need to be reviewed and clarified frequently as the project continued.

Once these steps were understood an issue was presented and the children went through the steps in order to resolve that issue. The steps being used were emphasized so that the students had a good understanding of the step by step process and

so that they could be positively reinforced for following those steps.

Once the children were familiar and comfortable with this process real issues that were troubling them was then used. By working on the issues that were happening within the classroom at that time, more interest was generated. Sometimes these issues were addressed for the entire group to help solve. At other times children were broken into groups which included children who did not normally work or play together. These groups were given issues on which to work and for which to find a solution. By encouraging the development of groups who did not normally interact it was hoped that the children would broaden their friendship base. Activities discussed by Hoagland, Eyler and Vacha (1981) in Project C.L.A.S.S.: Classroom Learning to Attain Social Skills were interjected to facilitate a more open, accepting environment within the class.

During this phase of small group interaction the teacher went from group to group, encouraging their efforts and giving assistance where needed. By allowing the children to work on their own in a small setting their awareness that they could handle these problems without adult intervention

was expanded. The use of social training activities allowed the children to become better acquainted with the other children with whom they did not normally associate.

The students demonstrated the process they used, through the use of roleplay, to the teachers in the school in a workshop. After the demonstration it was anticipated that the teachers would be given a potential conflict situation to roleplay the steps to use. The students were to be assigned to assist the teachers as they went through these steps. The teachers were so impressed with the roleplays however that they wished to ask questions of the children and their reaction to learning these processes instead. Hand outs, with the steps outlined, were given to the teachers so that they had the information to use in their own classrooms.

When working with children one expected to help them through the steps of conflict resolution. An understanding of other areas involved in conflict was helpful, as was an understanding of the developmental stage of the children involved. By teaching children positive, prosocial ways to handle the conflicts they encountered, they became more productive, sociable people.

Chapter V: Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

Results

This project was aimed at teaching conflict resolution strategies to children in a primary classroom. The outcome of the project was encouraging in that the children demonstrated they understood and could use the skills they had been taught and could get this skill across to others.

By teaching the children positive methods of interacting with their peers to resolve conflict peacefully it was anticipated that the amount of class time spent on disagreements could be lessened.

The first objective was for class time used in resolution of conflict to be reduced by 50% which would have reduced the time from 185 minutes to 92.5 minutes in conflict interactions among the students. By the end of the implementation period, observations kept over three days revealed that class time involved in disputes was 80 minutes, 105 minutes and 90 minutes on the three consecutive days. This results in an average of 91.7 minutes being used to resolve conflict, thus the objective was met. Table 1 shows this reduction in time.

Table 1
Minutes involved in conflict

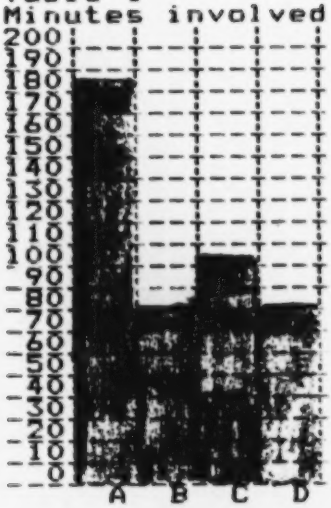


Table 2
Physical Force Being Used to Resolve Conflict

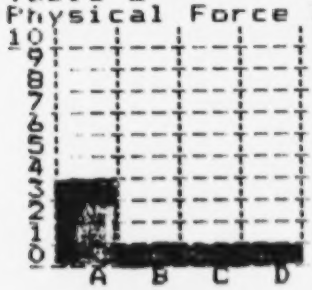
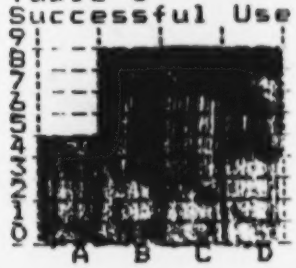


Table 3
Successful Use of Small Group to Resolve Conflict



A: Observation period at beginning of project.
B: Observation period 1 at end of project.
C: Observation period 2 at end of project.
D: Observation period 3 at end of project.

The second objective involved the children using positive, prosocial means of resolving conflict rather than physical force being used. It was hoped that the number of times physical force was used would be reduced from three out of nine times to once out of nine times. Over the three day observation period physical force was never used to resolve a conflict so this objective was met also. This result is illustrated in Table 2.

The third objective was that the children would develop a larger friendship base and that they would interact with students with whom they did not normally interact. This did not happen and the sociometric scale used revealed that the groupings of children tended to stay the same. Thus this objective was not met.

Children resolving conflict successfully within the group process was the fourth objective. It was projected that conflict would be resolved within the group process seven out of nine times up from four of nine times at the beginning of the period. The children demonstrated that they could use the group process successfully eight of the nine times a conflict arose. Table 3 shows these results.

The fifth objective was that teachers would demonstrate their knowledge of the process by answering a questionnaire concerned with the steps of conflict resolution and the ways it could be taught and used with young children. While the teachers demonstrated a straightforward knowledge of the material presented by returning the sheets and giving the correct responses their reaction to the roleplays the students gave and to the question time afterwards revealed some skepticism on their parts. Such comments as, " I don't know if I could teach this to my children. I would need to feel more comfortable with this myself first," or "I just don't think I have time to put this in too. There's already too much in the schedule," were common.

They did indicate their enthusiasm and support of the children in the project and the mature way they had handled it. They showed surprise that the children could handle conflict in such a mature way by expressing comments such as, " I'm surprised the kids could do this," or "They sure seem to understand all of this. They understand it a lot better than I do."

Most of the objectives were met within the guidelines established at the start of this

project. There were two which did not have the success that was desired.

Conclusions

This project was considered to have met the objectives well enough that it would be included in the curriculum for the classroom the following year. Some of the techniques used proved to be more interesting and motivating to the children. They preferred to work with their own groups rather than teacher made groups. They also preferred to work on issues that had surfaced during the course of the school day. Since several children were involved in these disagreements there was more of a willingess to try the process and see it to a successful conclusion.

Once they became involved with the writing, practicing and rewriting of the scripts they became quite serious about the process since they felt they would be giving something of value to the teachers in the school. One child's proud comment, "You mean we can teach the teachers!" showed the obvious enthusiasm the children felt in preparing for the workshop.

Since the students had to rehearse the steps of conflict resolution several times during the

course of the practice times, they became very good at being able to go through them. When conflicts did arise naturally in the class day, including practice times, the children involved stopped what they were doing and went through the steps until they reached a workable solution. Only once out of an average of ten times did the children seek out a teacher to help them solve a particular situation. When a teacher observed that a potential conflict situation was arising and asked if she could be of help the typical response was, "No, we know how to take care of this ourselves now. We'll call you if we need you."

Recommendations

It would be recommended to others who might wish to use this approach to follow a systematic program such as the one outlined. By the children seeing that conflict resolution strategies were a skill that could be learned much as math or reading, they seemed to put more emphasis on its importance. If the process is demonstrated only at those times of intense conflict, the emotions of the moment often negate the children being willing to listen to the steps and follow them through at that time. When taught at a separate time, when no

emotional issues were involved, the children were more open to listening to the reasoning behind the steps and were more willing to try them out on a trial basis.

Using small groups for practicing the skills would be recommended also, since this provided the students with the opportunity to try them out without the threat of the larger group looking on and possibly criticizing the participants. This approach also allowed the children to see the benefits of working within the small groups, as this would be a more likely size in a conflict situation than the larger group.

More approaches to attempt to have students interact with others besides their usual friends would be recommended too. The activities used were not stressed enough and once the children had the opportunity to go back to their usual groups they did so. Perhaps involving different groups in cooporative academic projects in the classroom would have been more successful and would be a suggestion for others interested in trying this method.

Dissemination

The director of the school requested that the students come back and go through their skits and question session with the parents' group. She wished for the parents in the school to be able to see how this approach worked with the students and how they could use it with their own children at home.

A journal article describing the process and the outcome of the project could be written also. This step would allow other teachers to try this approach in their classrooms and therefore, hopefully, cut down on their classtime used in resolving conflicts.

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Appendix A

ASSESSMENT SHEET

Students:

A _____
B _____
C _____
D _____
E _____
F _____
G _____
H _____
I _____
J _____
K _____
L _____
M _____
N _____
O _____
P _____
Q _____
R _____
S _____
T _____

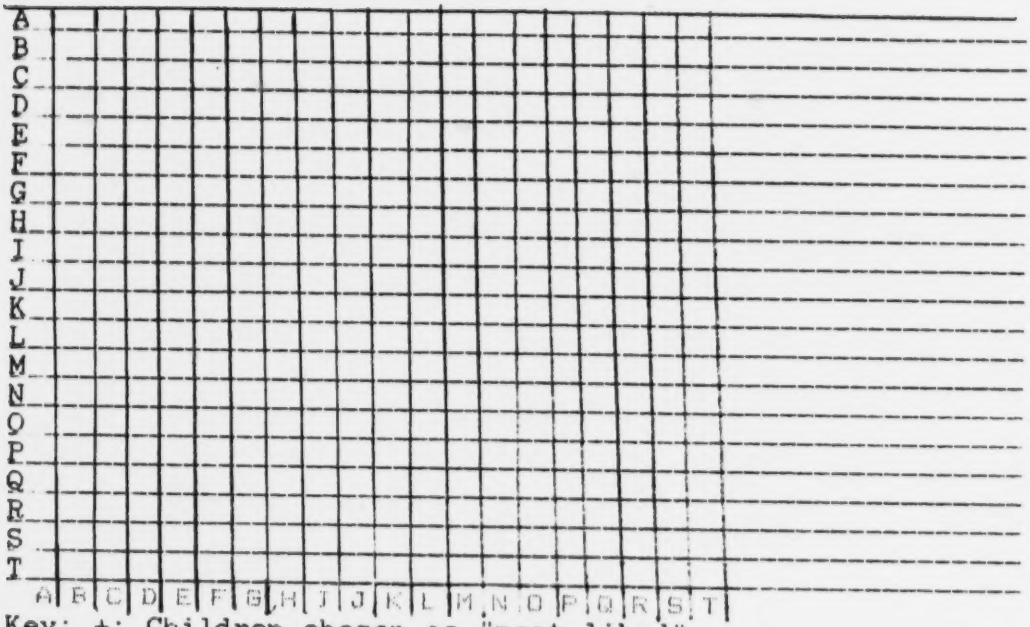
Key:

- x: Times when conflict becomes physical- punches, pushes, nudges, etc.
- v: Verbal conflict only- each "v" represents 5 minutes of verbal discussion or argument
- o: Time off task, but not actively involved in the conflict itself. Time spent out in the hall crying or keeping head on desk due to upset caused by conflict.

A number is written beside each key letter to denote which conflict of the day is being shown. In that way, it can be determined easily the children involved in each conflict.

Appendix B

SOCIOMETRIC SCALE



Key: +: Children chosen as "most liked"
-: Children chosen as "least liked"

Appendix C

WORKSHOP SYNOPSIS

1. Greeting and explanation of format of the day.
2. Roleplays by students of three possible scenarios in which the conflict resolution steps could be used.
3. Open discussion and question/answer period between teachers and students involved in roleplay.
4. Reviewing steps to use in resolving conflict. Discussing these steps and answering questions generated.

Appendix D

CONFLICT RESOLUTION STEPS

I. Define the problem in terms of needs.

II. Brainstorm possible solutions.

III. Select the solution(s) that will meet both (all) parties' needs- and check possible consequences.

IV. Plan who will do what, where, and by when.

V. Implement the plan.

VI. Evaluate the process and the solution.

(Bolton, 1979, p. 248,249)